

# Bordiga and the Passion for Communism

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*“Passion is the essential force of man energetically bent on its object.”*  
Karl Marx

Men are the products of their time: some are capable of representing it, because the invariance of their thought overcomes the ideology of the ruling class or expresses the impetuous assault of the oppressed class; others dominate it, because they are capable of perceiving the moments of discontinuity which mark the beginnings of the new stages of the process of becoming of a given mode of production (especially the new modes of production). In the former case we have the thought of continuity, in the second, that of discontinuity. In other words, we have traditional thought (in the non-pejorative sense) and revolutionary thought. Rare are those who are capable of thinking in accordance with both modalities, since this is not a case of a duality constituted by a spatial juxtaposition, but rather that of a contradictory duality. It is very often the case that the past and tradition weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living and prevent the emergence, the eruption, of the present and the future—which nonetheless operate in reality—in thought. This is true both during periods of social peace as well as in times of revolutionary unrest, the former favoring traditionalist expressions, while the latter are more likely to favor revolutionary expressions.

Amadeo Bordiga perfectly expressed the dominant ideas of the communist movement such as it developed after the Russian revolution and, at the same time, he expressed what this movement is, transformed into an ideological diaphragm: the real process of becoming—that is, not interpreted by Bolshevism or Leninism—of society. But his struggle against Leninist, Trotskyist and Stalinist deviations definitely hindered his investigation. His resolve to absolutely refrain from innovation, to restrict himself to commentary, to proving that everything has already been explicitly set forth, led him to remain within his limits. He was not one of those people who make a big splash because they manage to present themselves as more than they really are or because historical conditions have allowed them to surpass their limits, filling them with a substance not their own. Bordiga was just the opposite. He deliberately set limits for himself; he did not produce what he was potentially capable of producing. That is why his work, which is about the future, was inhibited or disguised by a kind of revolutionary hermeneutics. It constantly restrained his will to define the

specificity of this epoch in which the rule of capital is even stronger than it was before. Hence, in retrospect, the tragic character of his existence.

This hermeneutic is not concerned so much with displaying the hidden meaning of words and texts as it is with reestablishing the precise connection between the proletariat and theory, seen as a set of laws that rule the process of becoming of humanity towards communism and as a description of that process; for Bordiga, what was necessary was to refute the accumulated false meanings and contradictions upon which all the deviations of the proletarian struggle are based. Thanks to theory, the immediate consciousness of the class can be apprehended as a whole and can take root, so to speak, instantaneously. Unfortunately, mere hermeneutics do not suffice when it is something new that must be confronted. And there's the rub. The study of this latter problem can lead to an enrichment of theory. However, given the fact that the origin of this enrichment would in that case be a certain well-determined person, there would still be the possibility that this theoretical complement could be personalized and given a name. It is necessary to eliminate the person as subject. The party is the only institution that must pursue, and is capable of doing so, the task of clarification and enrichment to a good end—in a very delimited sense. This is why it is only when the International Communist Party grew to a certain size (although it will always be a relatively small minority) that Bordiga departed somewhat from his hermeneutics.

The best example of this may perhaps be found in this theoretical formulation of “semi-finished products”:

“The material has thus been presented just as it is. Apart from that, it is consistent with our solid affirmation that there is nothing literary, scholastic or academic in our way of proceeding; we do not have official schemas or programs and we are not producing elegant and polished texts, but we go forth fighting amidst misfortunes and troubles. That is why we have been able to characterize them as merely semi-finished, almost raw products, which will suffice for the comrades to keep them on their forward path. All of this is also in consonance with our doctrine, for which the time of discoveries and luminous systematizations is the time of progress and not of grey and sinister blundering. We do not claim to say anything new or original, we even reject any merit that is not that of being totally faithful to the integral revolutionary program, well-known and clear for anyone who has not been engulfed and blinded by the obscene vapors

of treason.

“The criterion of our concept of the party—in periods of domination by the enemy class and, unfortunately, also in periods of defensive action, without real struggles, on the part of our class—does not aspire to a cold and professorial order of scientific rigor, but is nourished solely by an obstinate, even sectarian, conviction, impermeable to the thugs of the other side. This criterion also finds support in the conclusion of our investigation, which can be characterized less as an investigation strictly speaking than as a vindication and restoration of an unbreakable faith that disregards the imbecilic rigor, documentation and modernization with which charlatans plague us from all sides.

“We work with fragments and we are not building a communist encyclopedia. Nor could it be otherwise, since our work is conditioned by the alignment of the enemy society and the desertion of entire divisions from our side.... If it was impossible to create such an encyclopedia when we were strong, we cannot pretend to do so when we are weak; the planks upon which the texts were based have been reduced to splinters whose substance is rigid and strong, but whose developments are sometimes incomplete and discontinuous. The revolution of the coming generations will reconstitute these splinters that our limited, but not timorous, efforts, are connecting to the fabric of the original picture that was already perfect more than a century ago, as we are constantly repeating.”<sup>1</sup>

Now is certainly not the time to compile an encyclopedia, but to understand the process of becoming of contemporary society, which can only be studied with Marxist theory as the “fabric of the original picture”, and at the same time to be in a condition to apprehend the transformations that have taken place in the last fifty years. Here the method of “semi-finished products” runs the risk of becoming a theoretical hodge-podge: as unexpected events take place, patches are put on the theory to make it fit reality. This is why the hermeneutic was necessarily insufficient. On the other hand, the revolution has effected its return and our times are discontinuous in relation to the revolutionary phase of 1917-1923. Capital has exceeded its limits: Karl Marx had effectively counted on this, but he did not fully explain it. At present there are far more con-games and theoretical obscenities than there were ten years ago, but the demand for theoretical work that dares to confront novelty as such is more urgent than it was then. In any case, it is not a matter of discovering a new theory, but rather of

developing theory on the basis of the theory that arose in 1848, which necessarily rules out the need for showcasing any names whatsoever. In short, on this particular point, Bordiga's speech, possible in a period of reflux, is totally inadequate for the current moment.

Bordiga's hermeneutics are after a fashion the complement of his prophetic vision (in the literal sense).

“We have loudly proclaimed many times to those who are greedy for palpable, but contingent, political victories, that we are revolutionaries not because we need to experience and to see the revolution in our lifetimes, but because we see it now, for the different countries, for the ‘fields’ and the ‘arenas’ of social evolution in which Marxism classifies the inhabited earth, as an event that is already susceptible to scientific verification. The fixed coordinates of the communist revolution are written, like solutions to demonstrated laws, in the space-time of history.”<sup>2</sup>

To defend theory is to defend the element that bridges the gulf created by the counterrevolution, the gap between the last revolutionary phase and the one that is to come. That is why this admonition echoes an assertion from 1960:

“A revolutionary—according to us—is someone for whom the revolution is as certain as something that has already happened.”<sup>3</sup>

And also this one from 1952:

“As a result, the problem of the praxis of the party does not consist in knowing the future, which would be too little, or wanting the future, which would be too much, but of ‘preserving the line of the future of one’s own class’.”<sup>4</sup>

By means of his hermeneutics and his prophecy, Bordiga affirms the great revolutionary potential of the class as it was when it unleashed its last great battle. It is a matter of preserving this potential and, if possible, of making it grow; one must remind the class of its mission and at the same time mercilessly criticize it for having accepted the leadership of cowardly, pusillanimous, treacherous leaders, and for having surrendered to the world of the commodity and to the immediatism of this “sordid civilization of the quiz show”; this class that no longer responds, as in the past century, to the least insult against the revolution, which in its own way makes possible the murder and massacre of



yellow people, blacks and Arabs, brutalized as it is by an internalized cult of Mammon.

One is the prisoner to a certain extent of the cause one embraces. The cause liberates and enchains, sometimes it paralyzes and inhibits. In Bordiga, the old “problematic” of the party is largely based on a broad vision of the party as the class,<sup>5</sup> on the vision of a human multitude engaging in revolution without appealing to any great man or Messiah, without glorifying anyone. All reverence, regardless of its object, brings us closer to the earth, to the tomb; victory is impossible without standing completely upright. And so in Bordiga we encounter visionary eruptions of the future, the perception of the totality of men, of the species; hence his multiform and torrential discourse. Hence also the use of an unexpurgated language, not strictly defined or nationalized. He borrows a multitude of words and expressions from various Italian dialects to render his discourse more expressive, just as he sows his writings with foreign words and phrases that more clearly express what he wants to explain and more accurately embody his thought, which is that of a being who even escapes, even if only in part, the linguistic despotism of capital:

“They can turn their faces, incapable of shame, towards the same crowd, the false spokesmen for the modern proletariat who have cast aside the truths that, in a Münzer, had the power to foreshadow a Marx, an Engels, a Lenin. These truths of doctrine and of life, which are today repudiated, are the class war and the extermination of the oppressor, the dictatorship of the party of the oppressed, the magnificent cycle that proceeds from faith (a stage that was not without its uses for two thousand years) to reason (a stage that was not without its uses over the last two centuries) and then to the class power that defeats the knowledge of the class of the modern tyrants, today’s vampires, the bourgeoisie of commodity society.

“Greater than the faith of the Middle Ages and greater than the reason of the liberal revolutions, the dictatorship of the ignorant and the wretched must be victorious, which was so luminously erected in the time of Lenin, during the councils of the communist revolution.

“... We have no particular preference for secularism as opposed to papal clericalism. We are only recording the minutes of the historical transition from faith to reason. But we desire, and we also foresee, the defeat of scientific reason, the abject simony of the capitalist form, and in this

sinister atmosphere we cry out to the proletariat: neither Christian faith nor bourgeois science, but the dictatorship of your virgin and raw force, of your force that will someday liberate man from the dictatorship of all darkness.

“And there will be light.”<sup>6</sup>

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“The workers will be victorious if they understand that they must not wait for anyone. Abiding in expectation of Messiahs and the cult of the genius, conceivable for Pierre and for Carlyle, are only, for Marxism in 1953, a miserable cover for impotence. The revolution will be terrible, but it will also be anonymous.”<sup>7</sup>

Bordiga always seeks to be grounded in Marx and he always wants to prove that Marx had the most correct approach to any particular question that he was currently addressing. He only allows himself to contribute improvements: with regard to the three examples of Chapter 27 of Volume I of Capital, Bordiga thought that he was in fact able to find the conclusion of that first book at the end of Chapter 32, with the famous passage about the expropriation of the expropriators, (\*)<sup>8</sup> the rigorous symbolic mathematics, in order to more accurately explain Marx's work. He also always needs to praise the coherence of the theory, even the coherence of what he called the Marxist school and which it would be better to call the historic party.

The will to coherence sometimes works like inertia. The discourse closes in on itself in order to restore its point of departure and to include within it the different parts in such a way as to make them compatible and not contradictory with the whole. The discourse is no longer open and there is almost a fear of going astray. It was by way of this hermeneutics, however, that he was capable of maintaining the theoretical discourse.

The impetuous development of capital forced Bordiga to come to terms with these positions. Beginning in 1957, after the discoveries of the *Grundrisse* and the *Manuscripts* of 1844, and especially the preparatory labors undertaken through the mediation of R. Dangeville (who also has the great merit of having translated the *Grundrisse* into French, even if the translation often leaves something to be desired), he postulated the non-closed nature of Marx's

discourse. These texts recently made available contain themes that had not been addressed at all or had been superficially addressed in the previously-known works of Marx. On the other hand, the threat posed by capital in the epoch that produced the launch of Sputnik, its will to resolve the difficulties of its life-process in a realized indetermination by escaping the attraction of the terrestrial globe and that of the human gravity that limits it, led Bordiga to overcome his sometimes scientific and overly-rigid perspective on certain questions.

We have to apprehend this revolutionary, this party man, in his connection with the future, since he lived in the future more than any other person and nonetheless simultaneously was responsible for the survival of a mystifying past that obscured this future.

“Marxism is precisely, in essence, a foreseeing of the future. Utopianism in the strict sense is not a foreseeing of the future, but rather a proposal to mold the future.”

It is, by the way, in this latter work that he provides a masterful demonstration of his claims regarding the foresight of the Russian revolution.

“When the great Bolshevik revolution was victorious, most of the old comrades and neophytes—the former perplexed, the latter inclined to enthusiasm—did not hesitate to lift up their voices in praise, convinced as they were that the theoretical affirmations of the old Marx and the old Engels had been dealt a terrible setback.

“We were among the few who, amidst the glory of the victorious event that shook the foundations of the capitalist world, saw nothing more than the luminous confirmation of a complete and harmonious doctrine, the realization of a long and arduous, but temporary, period of waiting.

“After more than thirty years replete with difficulties that were less propitious for generating revolutionary enthusiasm, the world colossus of capitalism survived the earthquake, and was still dominant after the second and even more bestial world war, the task of examining this process, which was both painful and hard to interpret and linking it—as Marxism claims to be capable of doing (to renounce this would presuppose an admission that one has completely gone astray from the line)—to the chain of constructions of two, or a little less than two centuries, we feel a hundred times more certain in fact of a confirmation of the doctrine, more certain



for not having mumbled the stupid, precipitate, conceited, and above all cowardly, repudiations of the inflexible line that, once found and accepted, cannot be transformed without also betraying it.”<sup>9</sup>

Bordiga foresaw a very long wait for the coming revolution. In 1957, on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution, in “7 novembre 1917-57: Quarante années d’une organique appréciation des événements de Russie dans le dramatique développement social et historique international”, he predicted the onset of a revolutionary phase in 1975. In 1958, he said:

“It is quite obvious that we are not on the threshold of the third world war, nor are we on the threshold of the great inter-war crisis, which will still take a few more years to develop, when the slogan of emulation and peace has revealed its economic content: one world market. Then, no State will be spared by the crisis.

“Today, there is only one conceivable victory for the working class: the doctrinal victory of Marxist economics over the commodity economy that is common to both the Americans and the Russians.

“In a second period, the task for the world Marxist party will consist in the victory of organization, in opposition to the demo-populist and demo-classist schemas.

“It is only in a third historical stage (which cannot take less than five years) when the question of class power will be on the table. In these three stages, the standard of measurement will be the shattering of equilibrium, first of all and above all—if the imbeciles will allow us—within the U.S. and within the U.S.S.R.”<sup>10</sup>

This expresses both the power and the limitations of Bordiga’s theoretical thought. The limitations, because the development of the revolution is still conceived according to the old perspective, and, furthermore, the terminology displays a not very rigorous delimitation: there is no Marxist economics (unfortunately, this expression is found quite frequently in Bordiga, even in texts of great value like the *Elements of Marxist Economics*), but only a critique of political economy, a critique of capital. His power lies in having indicated the determinant weak points of the world capitalist system and in having discerned the essential tendency of capital: the formation of a world market, although we must add that, at the present time, this tendency is no longer displayed in a

purely material form, but in the hard-to-apprehend form of fictitious capital which is invested not only in the western zone, but which is concentrating to an increasing degree in the countries of the East and is tending to include China.

We referred to this prediction in our treatise distributed in May of 1968, *L'être humain est la véritable Gemeinwesen de l'homme*,<sup>11</sup> for two reasons: (1) because 1968 opens up the new revolutionary stage, (2) because, in a contradictory way, Bordiga has not recognized the emergence of the revolution. His utter inability to perceive it is a result of his own preconception about the development of the reactivation of the revolution. It is above all the “second period” which is marred the most by the old concepts: a vanguard is necessary even if it is not referred to by this name. He therefore lost sight of the fact that the party is the class that constitutes itself as a party. The organizations which were intended to provide structure to consciousness, to be its depositories, or even the defenders of a restored theory, always end up being left behind, or else are transformed into obstacles for the revolutionary movement.

We therefore employ that last quotation for the purpose of identifying an element of continuity in the discontinuity created by May. Bordiga was able to correctly delimit the fundamental points of the reactivation of the revolution, and he should have been able to confront the moment of its manifestation, but the weight of the past prevented him from conceiving this moment of revolution in its new reality. The movement of May was necessary to tell off the old fossils on the question of organization and to reflect, even at the level of linguistic rigor, on theoretical expression. In May 1968 the essential thing was the emergence of communism, the anonymous manifestation of the revolution despite all the recuperative agitation of the groupuscules that stood outside the phenomenon, and this is the case even if this emergence borrowed some inadequate discourses, due to the fact that it had not purged itself of the old democratic beliefs. The explosion of May was the affirmation of a total rejection of the society of capital and the appeal to an affirmation of man, an impulse towards another type of community. Thus, many of the affirmations-demands of May 1968—the end of politics, the destruction of all separation, the rejection of the militant-slave and martyr (we have no merit, as Bordiga often said)—were present in the discourse of that uprising, but were based on an outdated vision; the link between these affirmations of the future and the praxis of the present was constructed by way of a now-superseded schema of the revolution that reconnected with, by uncritically glorifying them, all the factors of the revolution of 1917; hence its immersion and its inefficacy, which allowed it to be rejected by the epigones of

the International Communist Party.

The important thing is this affirmation of the future, this refusal to accept defeat, which could only be real because it was recognized as such. This certainty with regard to the future springs from the perception of the communist process of becoming of our society. The future revolutionary act will simply make possible the full unfolding of this process of becoming and will make it effective. Most revolutionaries are only revolutionaries because of the revolution itself, they are its immediate embodiment, or else they are perhaps the personification of a discourse on the revolution. As a general rule, the latter think of communism as something that is necessarily situated on the other side of a particular moment: the revolution. Then what is important for them is the latter, rather than communism. Communism only provides a certain determination for the revolution that prevents it from being confused with other kinds of revolutions.

For Bordiga, given that the revolution is the clash between two forms of production, the capitalist mode of production and the communist mode of production, it must be situated in relation to the totality of the new social form.

It is not a matter of presenting the totality of the human being, social man, if he ever was social, within the limits of what was possible in the epoch in which he lived. The human being, that is, the man of the party, a party whose program is communism. We merely want to present, and to confront, the fundamental determination: his relation to communism. Bordiga said and wrote concerning Marx and Engels that all of their work consisted in a struggle for, and an impassioned description of, communism. And he said this despite all the claims that Marx had simply described capitalism in its liberal phase (the croaking of these gentlemen!). This is the fundamental element, thanks to which Bordiga is always current, always contemporary. This does not obviate the fact that he also displayed other outdated aspects that pertained to all the erroneous concerns of a historical epoch that is now in the past.

If this affirmation was valid during his entire lifetime, however, it only acquired all its validity long after it was first conceived and this is connected with the development of the proletarian movement itself. Prior to 1914, there are no noteworthy analyses of communism by Bordiga. At that time he was immersed in the struggle to rectify and to regenerate the party: the struggle against frontism, electoralism, etc. With the Russian revolution and the rise of the soviets the anti-self-management thesis was confirmed: socialism is the destruction of the limits of the enterprise and its immediate implication is that it

is not a matter of creating factory councils that are modeled to one degree or another on the economic forms of organization of capital in order to spearhead the revolution; instead, a form of organization that negates those forms is necessary: the political party of the class.

“To maintain, alter the fashion of the Turin L'Ordine Nuovo comrades, that even before the collapse of the bourgeoisie the workers' councils are organs, not only of political struggle, but of technico-economic training in the communist system, can only be seen as a return to socialist gradualism. This latter, whether it is called reformism or syndicalism, is defined by the mistaken belief that the proletariat can achieve emancipation by making advances in economic relations while capitalism still holds political power through the State.”<sup>12</sup>

Here we see affirmed an invariable feature of Bordiga's thought, anti-gradualism: the revolution is presented as a catastrophe for the prevailing mode of production. This is accompanied by the rejection of all concretism, which is in fact the trap into which those who believe they can take historical shortcuts and thus avoid catastrophe fall.

“The most difficult problem of the communist tactic has always been to adhere closely to these characteristics of finality and generality which we talked about earlier.

“Instead of focusing all their strength and despite all the difficulties in the implacable Marxist dialectic of the revolutionary process, the Communists have often yielded to deviations where their action is lost and crumbled in so-called concrete achievements and an overestimation of certain institutions, which seem to constitute an easier bridge across to communism than the terrifying leap into the abyss of the Revolution, the “Marxist catastrophe from which will arise the renewal of humanity.

“Reformism, revolutionary syndicalism, the cooperative movement are this and nothing else.

“Some current maximalist trends which, faced the difficulties of the violent destruction of bourgeois power, search for a terrain to achieve and to concretize their activity, to render it possible technically, as well as initiatives that overestimate the anticipated creation of organs of the future economy such as factory committees, fall into the same mistakes.”<sup>13</sup>

During this whole period of his activity he was oriented towards the formation of the party that would have to intervene directly in the ongoing struggles, whether on behalf of the revolution in Italy, or to support the Russian revolution. On this theoretical level, there is a defense of the Russian revolution at the same time as an attempt to define the contours of the movement in the west. The question of communism is addressed indirectly, for example, on the occasion of the critique of a book by Graziadei in *L'Ordine Nuovo*, Nos. 3-6, 1924: *La théorie de la plus-value de K. Marx, base vive et vitale du communisme*.

The question of communism was also addressed with respect to the peasant movement—the agrarian question of 1921, where he confronts the problem of the socialist transformation of agriculture. Here we find very important considerations for this question, but it does not contain an authentic description of communist society. He remains on the terrain of general social relations, which are very important, but he does not see all the transformations that affect men.

After the second world war Bordiga confronted the post-capitalist period in more detail and tried to define communism more incisively.

“Leaping over a whole cycle, communism is the knowledge of a plan of life for the species. That is, for the human species.”<sup>14</sup>

Here, Bordiga reaffirms another constant refrain in Marx and all those who operate with the help of the theory Marx produced.

“Our formula is the abolition of wage labor; we have demonstrated that the formula of the abolition of private property in the means of production is a mere paraphrase...”<sup>15</sup>

“Socialism lies entirely in the negation of the capitalist enterprise, not in its conquest by the worker.”<sup>16</sup>

After the polemic that opened up again within the International Communist Party concerning the social nature of Russia and its development, Bordiga was obliged to once again pick up the thread of the succession of stages between capitalism and communism sketched by Marx in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*. At that time, however, he also engaged in a more far-reaching project: an attempt to take into consideration the exceptional development of capital

since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

“a) Disinvestment of capital, that is, the allocation of a smaller share of the product to producer goods.

“b) Raising the costs of production in order to provide, until the disappearance of wage labor, market and money, higher pay for shorter working hours.

“c) Rigorous reduction of the working day, at least to half of its current level, absorbing the unemployed and those engaged in anti-social activities.

“d) Reduction of the volume of production, with the help of a plan of under-production, which concentrates production in the most necessary sectors; authoritarian control over consumption, combating the widely-publicized fashions of those who are harmful and nefarious; abolition of activities that assure the propagation of a reactionary psychology.

“e) Rapid shattering of the limits of the enterprise with the authoritarian transfer not of personnel, but of materials of labor to the sphere of consumption.

“f) Rapid abolition of commodity-based insurance systems, in order to replace them with the social provision of basic needs of non-workers at a minimum level.

“g) Cessation of construction of houses and workplaces in the vicinity of the big cities and even the smaller ones, as a starting point for the uniform distribution of the population in the countryside. Reduction of the speed and volume of traffic by prohibiting that fraction of traffic that is useless.

“h) Determined struggle for the abolition of careers and titles, against professional specialization and the social division of labor.

“i) The first immediate measures to subject to the control of the communist State the schools, the press, all the means of broadcasting, information and networks of entertainment and amusement.”<sup>17</sup>

The publication of Stalin’s text, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, once again provided an occasion for a redefinition of the different stages. There



are no major differences with respect to the resolutions of the meeting in Naples of September 1, 1951 (“Leçons des contre-révolutions, doubles révolutions—nature capitaliste révolutionnaire de l’économie russe”, Thesis 45).

“We shall conclude our economic argument with a synthesis of the stages of the future society, since it is a question concerning which Stalin’s ‘document’ only sows confusion. France-Presse has accused him of plagiarizing the work of Nikolai Bukharin on the economic laws of the period of transition. In fact, Stalin cited this text several times, and he even mentioned Lenin’s critique of Bukharin’s book. Responsible for drafting the program of the Communist International, which as a result remained in the form of working notes, Bukharin had the great merit of elevating to the highest priority the anti-commodity postulate of the socialist revolution. Later, in the analysis of the period of transition in Russia, he followed Lenin, recognizing that commodity forms would have to endure during the dictatorship of the proletariat. Everything is clear if you take into account the fact that this stage analyzed by Lenin and Bukharin precedes the two stages of communist society that Marx talks about and of which Lenin gave a magnificent illustration in a chapter of *The State and Revolution*.

“The following schema can recapitulate the difficult theme of today’s dialogue:

“— Stage of transition: the proletariat has conquered power and must leave the non-proletarian classes outside of its law, precisely because it cannot ‘abolish them’ in one fell swoop. This means that the proletarian State controls an economy of which one of its parts, always shrinking, is the locus of commodity distribution and even private forms of the allocation of the products and of the means of production (whether concentrated or dispersed). A not-yet-socialist economy, a transitional economy.

“— Lower stage of communism or, if you like, of socialism. Society has now obtained control over products in general and allocates them to its members by means of an ‘emergency’ plan. Exchange and money have ceased to perform this function. One may only concede to Stalin that simple, non-monetary exchange—but always in accordance with the law of value—can be a perspective of channeling society’s passage to communism; this would represent, however, a kind of regression to the system of barter. The allocation of products, however, is determined from

the center and is carried out in turn without equivalents. Example: when a malaria epidemic breaks out, quinine is distributed at no cost in the afflicted zone, but only one vial per inhabitant.

“In this stage, not only is it necessary to compel people to work, but there must also be a record of the labor time performed and a certificate that registers that performance, i.e., the famous coupon that has been the focus of so much debate over the last century. This coupon possesses the characteristic of not being susceptible to accumulation. Any attempt to do so presupposes the forfeit of a certain quantity of labor without an equivalent. The law of value is laid to rest (Engels: society no longer attributes ‘value’ to its products).

“— The higher stage of communism can also be called, without any doubt, full socialism. The productivity of labor has reached the point where restrictions and emergency rules are no longer necessary (except in pathological cases) to prevent the squandering of products and human force. Freedom for each person to take what he wants for his consumption.

“Example: the pharmacies distribute quinine at no cost and without any restrictions. And what if someone takes six vials to poison himself? Such people would effectively be as stupid as those who confuse a putrid bourgeois society with socialism.

“What stage has Stalin reached? None of the three. He is not at the stage of the transition from capitalism to socialism, but at the stage of the transition to capitalism. This is almost respectable and has nothing to do with suicide!”<sup>18</sup>

There is a certain absurdity in engaging in polemics with Stalin, as if the latter, after the defeat of the revolution, had not acquired the right to do whatever he wanted with the theory; only a victorious struggle would have been able to reestablish it. It is true that refuting Stalin might be useful for reaffirming the fundamental, non-falsified factors of the theory. The refutation of Stalin is therefore a chapter in Bordiga’s hermeneutics; it was moreover necessary to situate the necessity of mystification and its characteristics. However, we cannot refrain from posing the following question: how was it possible that a whole nation could have distorted Marxist theory? And also, with respect to the West: is it possible that what Marx had formulated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century could still be valid in every point today? Isn’t society much more mature today? These

questions were not posed.

Bordiga would later abandon this polemic. At the time, he intended to use it as a positive affirmation, and as a recognition of the vacuum, of the absence of any revolutionary movement, outside of the confines of a few small groups. However, the polemic against other currents had already fallen by the wayside for quite some time. This polemic was then turned inward; hence the discourse converted into a dialogue in which the author does not disclose the identity of his interlocutor. Down with the cult of personality! Bordiga said that he was against polemics, but to overcome them it was necessary to found something that, outside of discontinuity, creates a field that the enemy could only enter with difficulty, because it is occupied by communism; this is what he tried to do and this contributed somewhat to an advance beyond the horizon of his hermeneutics.

The internalized polemic was often the justification for its internal employment. The left is not just a cultural movement, a study circle, it does not reject action (cf. the position on the trade unions). This basically refers to Damen, just as at the congress of Bologna, the reference to Lenin, the question of tactics, etc.

Finally, he had to distinguish himself from the German-Dutch left, and from the KAPD in particular. This is the reason for the commentaries and the attacks that are incomprehensible for anyone who is unfamiliar with all the vicissitudes of the Italian Left and Bordiga.

There is one point, however, where the polemic was not really internalized, which provides a manifestation unclouded by any justifications whatsoever; and that is when it deals with communism.

In his “Dialogue with the Dead” he does not retrace the study of the post-capitalist stages. But it is from the moment of the publication of this text that he places the highest priority on the following theorem: one does not build socialism. Henceforth, it was no longer a matter of refuting Stalin or his successors by responding negatively to the question of whether or not socialism existed in the USSR, but of destroying the very basis of this question. To build socialism is an affirmation of a clear utopian style that irresistibly evokes the various projects for the construction of the shining city. This implies a pre-established plan, conceived and understood only by a handful of leaders, or geniuses, etc. In reality, communism develops on the basis of elements that already exist in the capitalist mode of production and only the activity of the

proletarians, by overthrowing capitalism, will allow the process of becoming of communism to proceed to its fulfillment. The party, for Bordiga, is a guiding force in this current; it steers a process that it has not created and above all it is opposed to any leadership that wants to divert the generous force of the proletariat. It was in 1957, especially during the meeting in Paris—whose resolutions were published under the title, “Les fondements du communisme révolutionnaire dans l’histoire de la lutte prolétarienne internationale”—and on the occasion of the study of the Russian-Yugoslavian polemic, when this concept was enunciated by Bordiga with even greater clarity. In the first text mentioned above, Bordiga restated to a certain extent what he had always affirmed against the idea that there are various paths to communism; we may discern echoes of this in his articles from 1920 on the soviets, and in his writings against the policy of founding revolutionary activity on the basis of the enterprise (during the Bolshevization of the Communist International). “The economic organizations of the enslaved proletariat are crude substitutes for the revolutionary party”:

“The beast is the enterprise, not the employer that the enterprise has at its head. How are we to reckon the economic equations between enterprises, especially when the big ones crush the small ones, how do we make these estimates between enterprises among which some have appropriated the yields of low productivity, while others have appropriated the yields of high productivity, or among those that use ‘conventional’ means of production and those that use nuclear energy? This system, erected like all its other features on a fetishism of equality and justice among individuals and on a disingenuous horror of privilege, of exploitation and of oppression, would be for them to the contrary a means of culture even more favorable than the usual civil society.”<sup>19</sup>

The discovery of the *Grundrisse* and the *Manuscripts* of 1844 marked, as we have already pointed out, an important moment in the work of Bordiga. Even so, he did not really proceed beyond hermeneutics. He refuted those who thought that the development of automation is a practical refutation of Marx’s theory of value. Bordiga did not, however, extract all the logical consequences of the affirmation that living labor time tends increasingly to decline in the capitalist mode of production, that the activity of the worker is becoming almost superfluous. He merely deduces from this postulate that value will have been destroyed “doctrinally” before it is effectively destroyed in the armed struggle of the future revolution. However, Marx’s affirmations that have currently encountered their verification in the most highly developed zones of the world

imply that it really is possible to destroy value immediately. This also poses the question concerning the nature of productive labor in today's society, the role of the proletariat in the classic configuration, a modification of the post-capitalist stages such as they were defined by Marx in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* for an epoch in which the capitalist mode of production was far from having reached its current level. Bordiga's demonstration falls far short of being comprehensive in the sense that its purpose is to show that the proletariat has no reason to reject his theory, Marxism, since the latter has been absolutely verified. He did not concern himself sufficiently with the total process of becoming of capital and of the communism that is bound up with it.

More profound was the moment when Bordiga delimited the revolutionary reformism of Marx which he had nonetheless evoked with respect to the law regulating the length of the working day in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; a law demanded by Marx and for which, he thought, the proletariat should have fought bitterly, which it did. Defining the revolutionary reformism of Marx entails also posing the question of the revolutionary reformism of the proletariat. This reformism was valid as long as capital had not completed its real domination. In effect, what this means is that fighting for the reduction of the working day, and considering that socialism is the dramatic diminution of the duration of the working day even while capital is throwing workers onto the street or is creating artificial jobs that do not create surplus value and that, ultimately, do not even help to realize surplus value, are only necessary to maintain labor as coercion. Capital has disintegrated the vital working day of man. It is now a matter of restoring it outside of capital. Furthermore, this determination of the working day only exists because human activity must be measured; socialism is the destruction of such measurement, while value, capital, cannot exist without it. This by no means implies that we should insult the proletarians who are demanding a reduction of the working day or an earlier retirement age, which would amount to demanding that the contradiction of capital must cease: its tendency of being unable to exist without men while at the same time diminishing the labor time included in each capital-commodity. Such a demand always involves aggression against capital even if it can be increasingly absorbed in the latter's reformism, which is restructuring the working week and finding different ways to re-allocate labor among the different components of society. At its origins, however, such a demand led to a reinforcement of the unification of the class and compelled an augmentation of the productive forces by stimulating the mechanism.

From now on it is obvious that one cannot consider the movement towards socialism on the basis of the stages formulated by Marx. We must specify how capital has in fact entered the stage of transition and, in a way, the lower stage of socialism. In order to carry out this task, we must obviously refer to the work of Marx, beginning with the *Grundrisse* and Volume 3 of *Capital*.

Likewise, Bordiga was capable of more firmly grounding his opposition to the world of the commodity, affirmed on various occasions in his previous periods; for example, at the meeting in Naples in 1952, in “Caractères non mercantiles de la société socialiste”, in which he included a commentary, which he would have to revise several times, on the chapter on the fetishist character of the commodity. This characterization is repeated as a leitmotif in his articles on the agrarian question, which were published in late 1953 and early 1954 in *Il Programma Comunista*. Similarly, in 1963:

“With science, technology and labour, does man exploit nature? No, not at all, and the intelligent relationship between man and nature will arise when one stops making cost and design calculations in money, but in physical and human quantities.

“One can say exploiting when a human group exploits another. The exploited collaborated with the exploiting enterprise in the grandiose constructions of the mercantile period. Many people were employed at Longarone and money was thrown around. The engineer has to answer: did it rain gold? It is true that a skilled worker struck over the evident danger of landslides, but it is also a bitter lesson that the worker who was kicked out by the cursed surveyor because he was lame and would not have been able to escape in case of danger reacted in a violent manner. When the pay is good, risks to human life are normal fare for the society of money and wages.

“The whole valley ran the risk, and now it is dead.”<sup>20</sup>

Here we must also note that it is not enough to say that man will dominate nature when “the sinister social forces which enslave us more than millions of cubic meters of tombstones”<sup>21</sup> have been overthrown; man will also be able to reconcile himself with nature as Marx affirmed in 1844. The will to domination, the very expression of the despotism of capital, has only led to the destruction of nature and the manipulation of human nature, as Adorno has correctly pointed



out.

Today everything is capital and, as a result, to speak of the world of the commodity takes on the form of a concession to the past. One may reply that Bordiga considered it as a fundamental aspect of capitalism and not as a separate, autonomous entity. This is true, but in that case his condemnation suffers from the fact that it operates only on the level of negativity: the definition of communism as a non-commodity society. However, in his commentaries on Marx's notes on Mill, Bordiga goes beyond this negativity and rises to a vision of the totality. Communism knows neither exchange nor the gift (our addition), because the gift is nothing but a deferred exchange or at most an initial moment of exchange.

Bordiga once again denounced production for the sake of production, the slogan according to which socialism is immediately characterized by the augmentation of the productive forces, the myth of production, of the indefinite growth of the GDP (which has the consequence of exacerbating the slavery of men); and he antithetically defined communism as the mode of production in which "the goal of society is not production but man". This inevitably led him to revisit his thesis that consumption would become consumption for man and that, correlatively, the urgent need to regenerate the species, to dis-intoxicate man, arises.

The condemnation of the society of capital required the study of the previous modes of production; the revelation, after Marx, of their superiority over our society imposed a new focus on primitive communism, defined as natural communism, a mixture to some extent of myth and social poetry. With these works, the strict boundaries within which we had operated until then with Engels and his work on *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, a framework in which African or Asian societies could not find a place without shameless distortions of reality. Engels does not deserve all the blame for this, for he did state in his book that:

"Space does not allow us to consider the gentile institutions still existing in greater or lesser degree of purity among the most various savage and barbarian peoples, nor the traces of these institutions in the ancient history of the civilized peoples of Asia."<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, by pointing out the dispossession suffered by man over the course of the development of class societies, Bordiga was led to reconsider the link between modern and ancient science with other forms of human knowledge,

art and religion. His interest in myths was further intensified, and he did not approach them from the reductionist perspective of a stupid historical materialism, but as powerful expressions of man's desire to recompose his community and to surpass the limits imposed on him by the rise of class societies. As for the myths that arose within societies without classes, they were the testimonies of an elevated conception of the bond between man and nature. An example is the myth of immortality. With the advent of classes, man was reduced to an individual, an isolated particle, and he suffers the full weight of this isolation-solitude; death appears as the perfect realization of this solitude-separation; it must be fought by way of the certainty of a beyond where the community is recreated, an illusion that allowed it to maintain its continuity. For the man of the society of the future, immortality is no longer situated in a state beyond death, but within the life of the species, from which the individual is not separated because social man is at the same time *Gemeinwesen*.

Anti-democratism is reinforced by contact with the analysis of the works of Bordiga's youth, but unfortunately he never carried out an exhaustive study of the democratic phenomenon and, therefore, communism as the negation of democracy was more asserted than proven. He also redefined invariance as the permanence of the solution of the enigmas arrived at by Marx in 1844, and he vigorously reaffirmed the reasons why the party must be the anticipation of the future society. But the point we must emphasize is the question of anti-individualism, or anti-personalism, which assumed vast proportions, becoming the axis of his entire concept of communism and the basis for his attitude towards previous periods.

Bordiga demonstrates that the individual exceptional-personality has no determinative power. We have to apprehend the history of humanity not as a product of the labors of individual geniuses, but as the work of millions of men who have labored in obscurity for millennia. In the final reckoning, only beings endowed with rare faculties can recognize in themselves the immense process of becoming of millions of forces that are crystallized within them at any given moment, and are thus capable of becoming aware of how little they actually add to the ongoing labors since the emergence of the species. This anti-individualism is the affirmation of the species man, a species in the process of becoming, not of a simple sum of individuals but of the *syngameon* that Bordiga discusses in "The Factors of Race and Nation in Marxist Theory" (1953).<sup>23</sup> This concept is elaborated on the basis of the perception of the decisive and undeniable importance of mass action, the action of the immense multitude of proletarians,

during the course of revolutions. With this he reaffirmed the existence of the millions of beings who had worked or who are working on behalf of the revolution. Bordiga did not boast of his own work but testified to that of those others, at a time when the counterrevolution erased, and tended to do so permanently, the vestiges of their struggles. In this sense he was still a prophet.

Bordiga was right to denounce the passivity, or neutrality, of various human molecules that,

“[in] a non-ionized historical environment ... are not oriented towards two antagonistic alignments. In those dead and repugnant periods, the person-molecule can situate itself in any orientation. The historical ‘field’ is a cesspool and nobody cares. It is in these moments when the cold and inert molecule, not affected by an impetuous current or fixed on an unswerving axis, envelops itself in a kind of crust called conscience, and sets about chattering and asserting that it goes where it wants and when it wants, and elevates its measureless nullity and stupidity to the status of the motor force, the causal subject, of history.

“When the atmosphere is ionized, however, then:

“The individual man-molecule finds itself in its alignment and flies all along its line of force, finally forgetting the idiotic pathology that centuries of aimless wandering have celebrated with the name of free will.”<sup>24</sup>

This is the best proof of the fact that it is capital that reduces men to their status as molecules, that it leaves them bereft of the ability to express themselves, without any capacity for reaction, full of their own substance. Capital has taken their activity from men and given them a wage and an ideology in exchange. The more men are dispossessed, the stronger is capital. Capital, however, repudiates the individualist-liberal theory and Bordiga’s shortcoming is not to have taken this into account: fascism was the negation of individuals with the exaltation of a handful of necessary leaders, a kind of spectacular general equivalent for the slave men of capital who must rule. This is why it is impossible to simply postulate a negation of the individual, because this negation is a possibility in the formation of a totalitarian ideology that serves to maintain the despotism of capital, and in a way sanctifies the loss of energy of all individuals who will have to revolt against capital. The communist revolution, of course, will pursue to its logical conclusion the negation of the individual mentioned above, the negation of the person as being allegedly determinant in historical processes, but

this negation will not be for the purpose of replacing this individual with the collective man who already exists in the form of the collective worker, another modality of the existence of capital, even though it is the basis of communism. If one nullifies man by nullifying individuals, who will carry out the revolution, in view of the fact that even in the party these individual-men will still be so many nobodies? The party-entity, the master alchemist capable of transforming a sum of zeroes into an architect of the revolution!

The danger in Bordiga is that he maintains his thesis of the negation of the individual right up to the advent of communism. By finally denying man as a unit, communism appears henceforth to be solely the triumph of the species.

In this grandiose construction, economic individualism is eliminated and social man appears, whose limits are the same ones as those of human society, or more accurately, of the human species.

Bordiga therefore interprets the social man of Marx as the species. More evidence for this identification resides in the fact that, later in his life, when specifying the content of the unitary human element, he would speak of the social individual. This calls for two clarifications. Individualism is an absolutely reprehensible theory and it must be destroyed, but, as we saw above, it is capital itself that is tending to do so. It is clear enough that it cannot be eliminated after the disappearance of its normal basis, the individual, whether the real nullity—the proletarian—a nullity inflated by the necessities of capital—or the great man of our times, who, in the eyes of capital's own adepts, is increasingly taking on the appearance of an insignificant clown. Bordiga's anti-individualism, however, is not accompanied by the elimination of expressions like "the genius Marx", "the great Marx", "the great Lenin", etc. It might be replied that such locutions had the purpose of emphasizing the fact that great men, or great leaders, etc., cannot exist today. This is indisputable. In the early 1920s, Gorter correctly pointed out that the more powerful the class becomes, the less need it has for leaders. Yet this by no means implies that we must produce theories that almost eulogize the insignificance of the men who must compose the vast revolutionary movement that will overthrow capital. Our task is necessarily entirely the contrary, without nourishing any illusions, because only the revolution will effectively provide men with the energy necessary to destroy the monster of capital. And we shall add that, for Marx, social man is the man who becomes the individual in the future communist society. We will finally point out that to speak of a communist society is a concession to immediate understanding; in

fact, the human being will be the *Gemeinwesen* (the community), which can still be apprehended immediately by speaking of the human species, even if the latter is still an all-too-zoological concept, and social man.

Social man will not exist in opposition to *Gemeinwesen*, since social man will at the same time be *Gemeinwesen*, he will be at the same time individual and universal; otherwise, no supersession will have taken place, as we may clearly discern from Marx's notes on the works of Mill:

“Exchange, both of human activity within production itself and of human product against one another, is equivalent to species-activity and species-spirit, the real, conscious and true mode of existence of which is social activity and social enjoyment. Since human nature is the true community [*Gemeinwesen*] of men, by manifesting their nature men create, produce, the human community [*Gemeinwesen*], the social entity, which is no abstract universal power opposed to the single individual, but is the essential nature of each individual, his own activity, his own life, his own spirit, his own wealth. Hence this true community does not come into being through reflection, it appears owing to the need and egoism of individuals, i.e., it is produced directly by their life activity itself. It does not depend on man whether this community [*Gemeinwesen*] exists or not; but as long as man does not recognise himself as man, and therefore has not organised the world in a human way, this community [*Gemeinwesen*] appears in the form of estrangement [*Entfremdung*], because its subject, man, is a being estranged from himself.”

Similarly, in the *Manuscripts* of 1844:

“Above all we must avoid postulating ‘society’ again as an abstraction vis-à-vis the individual. The individual is the social being. His manifestations of life – even if they may not appear in the direct form of communal manifestations of life carried out in association with others – are therefore an expression and confirmation of social life. Man's individual and species-life are not different, however much – and this is inevitable – the mode of existence of the individual is a more particular or more general mode of the life of the species, or the life of the species is a more particular or more general individual life.

“In his consciousness of species man confirms his real social life and simply repeats his real existence in thought, just as conversely the being of

the species confirms itself in species consciousness and exists for itself in its generality as a thinking being.

“Man, much as he may therefore be a particular individual (and it is precisely his particularity which makes him an individual, and a real individual social being [*Gemeinwesen*]), is just as much the totality – the ideal totality – the subjective existence of imagined and experienced society for itself; just as he exists also in the real [*Wirklichkeit*] world both as awareness and real enjoyment of social existence, and as a totality of human manifestation of life.”

Thus, social man (*Gemeinschaftlicher Mensch*) is at the same time an individual and *Gemeinwesen*. If one translates this latter term by “social being”, it is then easy to identify it with social man and, in this way, to avoid one of the essential determinations: the individual determinateness. Bordiga’s position is pregnant with regeneration from the despotism of society, and therefore from capital made man.

Finally, this theoretical formulation has immediate consequences in the concept of the party, since the latter is the anticipation of the communist society. This concept leads Bordiga to attribute everything to the party and nothing to its members, who not only do not exist except by way of its mediation, but are interchangeable parts without any more substance than that which is assigned to them by the party, or its center, as the epigones would later say when they re-examined some of Bordiga’s observations. This led to an avian distemper that was all the more stupid the greater the number of parrots that caught it. Such is evidently the caricature to which this concept inevitably leads when it has the opportunity to take shape.

You cannot fight against capital on its own ground, that of the destruction of men. That is why the party can only be defined as that which inaugurates a new community in which the members cannot be, and this follows logically, social men, but beings with a profound need to fight for the appropriation of human existence, realizable only after the communist revolution, which makes effective the potentials of our society.

This latter concept is an example of the insufficiency of a hermeneutic that operates on the basis of the presupposition that the characteristics of communist society, clearly determined and antithetical to those of capital, are given by the rise of the class, which is true from a general point of view but not with respect



to particular factors. It is on the basis of the particular, however, that the process of becoming which bears variations in its train is set in motion. Thus, in the final phase of capital, which to a certain extent, can be called decadent, capital imitates the society of the future and realizes some of the immediate demands of the proletariat: generalization of the proletarian condition, socialization of production, introduction of economic planning, negation of the individual, domination of nature, etc. In a way, under a mystified form, there is a realization of the domination of the proletariat and of certain measures of the lower stage of socialism. To affirm that this mystification is simultaneously the destruction of men (capital can only develop destructive forces) is not enough, since from its origin capital destroys the two sources of wealth: nature and man. We must determine to what extent capital has gone beyond its limits by becoming fictitious capital and how this fictional quality has a repercussion on the process of becoming and the action of the revolutionary class, that is, we must precisely define its nature and redefine its immediate program.

Without going so far as to delimit this fictional quality of capital, Bordiga did, however, address this task; this is why his works are full of starting points for new research, which were never brought to further development because they were inhibited by the organizational inertia of the International Communist Party, whose existence manifested the ambiguity of the position and works of Bordiga himself.

It is this task that, for us, is essential, as well as the description of all the revolutions that have convulsed humanity and have served to prepare for the one that must finally come from this long and dolorous wait, which is now largely experienced.

Some people will have a tendency to classify the work of Bordiga among the manifestations of absolute dogmatism, in the sectarian schema, thinking that he definitively denied the process of becoming, by proclaiming that he had undervalued the dialectic, etc., all because they will not have understood a fundamental point: if there is an “invariance of Marxism” it is not because the latter, as a theory of the proletariat, like communism, a truth born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is always valid, in such a way that society would be the same as it was in 1848 (since then it was only a matter, to make it triumph, of resorting to an adequate agitation thanks to a solid organization), but because it is an anticipation. Communism appears not only as the solution of the proletariat-capital antagonism that existed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but also of the antagonism

that is presented, with new determinations, between the proletariat and capital in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, because the theory contains the foresight of the whole course of historical development of capital and of the modalities according to which the maturation of social relations had to facilitate the process of becoming of communism. Marx expressed the generic solution and exposed the phases that human society would have to pass through in order to realize communism. And this is valid not just for the works of Marx, but also for the works of the proletarian class itself, for, by way of its struggle, its assault on heaven, its radical revolution, it anticipated the solution by externalizing it.

For Bordiga, the revolution as art is intuition; that is why it does not abide by compromises, but is instead a lightning assault that must transform everything to attain its goal; without this, there is no anticipation. In counterrevolutionary periods of reflux, the task is to maintain the level of anticipation. Hence the revolutionary proposition (because it demolishes the old perspective), “Marxism is a theory of the counterrevolution”, since it is a matter of maintaining the line of the future when the whole social development in process denies it in an immediate way. On the other hand, when there is no longer any action, only reflexive and intensive thought can reencounter that which the activity of the masses had been able to discover after its generous impulse. Correspondingly, the possibility then arose that, as a result, thinkers would take themselves for inventors, for the authors of the discoveries brought to light by the multitude of men in struggle against the enemy class, the established order. At the moment when the exploited class destroys the enemy class, it creates the field upon which it will be able to manifest the new vision, the understanding of the new social organism. The anticipation implies the destruction of everything that stands in its way. The theory allows, in the periods of reaction, the maintenance of revolutionary continuity to the extent that it maintains the potential to negate the field of historical-social inhibition.

This is what explains the apparent contradiction of the behavior of Bordiga when he affirms the primacy of theory and exalts at the same time the activity of uneducated, frustrated and ignorant men, the proletarians, the representatives of non-culture, the only persons who are capable of carrying out the revolution. Unfortunately, he did not sufficiently take into account the fact that in the prolonged absence of a revolutionary movement, theory itself can be negated, both directly and indirectly, by way of the introduction of all kinds of concepts that are alien to it, or because it is paralyzed and reduced to a stereotype. On the other hand, we must point out that communism-theory-anticipation, without

theory, can appear as a magical affirmation. Furthermore, within this anticipation, there are moments that have now been realized, and irreversibly rendered obsolete. Bordiga explained one of them: the use of democracy. Now the revolutionary movement in process moves in the realized, and realizing anticipation. We must therefore resume the profound theoretical work to delimit, on the basis of this point, the process of becoming of the real movement and anticipate its future.

The counterrevolution works by destroying the revolutionary forces represented by the associations of men, by parties; then it implements, from above, gradually, in a mystified form, the demands of those associations; when its task is completed and the revolution inevitably recedes, it can only retard the revolutionary process by submerging the new revolutionaries in the rediscovered discourse of the previous era. Thus, these new revolutionaries, instead of applying themselves to the task of understanding reality, believe they are more revolutionary because they rehabilitate the themes and slogans of their ancestors from fifty years before. Revolutionaries with the eyes of antiquarians can only see in the present-day movement the struggles of the past. It is the moment of the flourishing of the various returns to the diverse currents of the period of the early 1920s, as we currently observe. There can be no doubt that there will also be an intensive return to Bordiga due to his description of communism; but a mere return would miss the point, since Bordiga cannot give a global, adequate view; he lived in the moment of the passage of capital from its formal domination to its real domination, and he was acquainted with the revolutionary movements that developed over the course of this transformation. This marked him with certain limitations: the impossibility of irrevocably cutting his ties with the past (the Third International and its sequels), the inability to correctly delimit the process of becoming of the new revolutionary movement, not recognizing its first manifestations in May 1968. Not to take this into account would be to betray Bordiga's passion as well as ours, which must attain its object: communism.

Jacques Camatte

January 1972

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Translated into English in September 2017 from the Spanish translation of the "Colectivo Germinal", entitled "Bordiga y la pasión del comunismo".

All references to Bordiga's texts, essays, articles and conference reports in the above translation have been left in their French versions in accordance with

practice observed in the Spanish translation, except where English versions could be located on the internet, in which case the English reference is also provided along with its internet link (links operative as of September 2017).

Original title: “Bordiga et la passion du communisme”. First published as the Introduction to Jacques Camatte (ed.), *Bordiga et la passion du communisme: textes essentiels de Bordiga et repères biographiques*, Spartacus, Paris, 1972.

Source of the Spanish translation: <http://colectivogerminal.org/bordiga-y-la-pasion-del-comunismo/>.

The French original of the text may be found online at:  
<http://socialismandorbarbarism.blogspot.com/search/label/Camatte>.

# Notes

[←1]

Transcript from the minutes of the meeting in Florence, March 1960:  
“Révolutions historiques de l’espèce qui vit, œuvre et connaît. Première  
séance: construction générale du rude travail de notre mouvement”, *Il  
Programma Comunista*, No. 8, 1960. [All footnotes are the author’s unless  
otherwise indicated—American translator’s note.]

[←2]

“Relativité et déterminisme. À propos de la mort d’Einstein”, *Il Programma Comunista*, No. 9, 1955; and also published in *Invariance*, Series I, No. 8.



[←3]

“Le texte de Lénine sur l’extrémisme, maladie infantile du communisme”,  
in *Il Programma Comunista*, No. 19, 1960.

[←4]

“Propriété et capital”, *Prometeo*, Series II, p. 126.

[←5]

The claim that, for Bordiga, the party is in the final reckoning the class (obviously the class as subject), is perhaps the only interesting and important point in A. De Clementi's book about Bordiga (Einaudi, 1971, p. 122).

[←6]

“L’idiotie époque frontiste”, *Il Programma Comunista*, No. 19, 1962.

[←7]

“Fantômes carlyliens”, *Invariance*, Series I, No. 5.

[←8]

The French original contains an asterisk in parentheses (\*) immediately after the phrase, “l’expropriation des expropriateurs” and before the phrase, “la symbolique mathématique”. Note added by the American translator of the Spanish translation.

[←9]

*Ibid.*, Thesis 47, at the end.



[←10]

“Le cours du capitalisme mondial dans l’expérience historique et dans la doctrine de Marx”, at the end of Thesis 44, *Il Programma Comunista*, No. 2, 1958.

[←11]

Cf. *Invariance*, Series I, No. 3, 1968.

[←12]

“Pour la Constitution des Soviets en Italie”, *Il Soviet*, No. 1, 1920. [In English, see “Towards the Establishment of Workers' Councils in Italy”, online at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1920/workers-councils.htm>. American translator’s note.]

[←13]

“Les buts des communistes”, *Il Soviet*, 1920. [In English, see “The Goals of the Communists”, online at: [http://www.pcint.org/07\\_TP/013/013\\_goals-communists.htm](http://www.pcint.org/07_TP/013/013_goals-communists.htm). American translator’s note.]

[←14]

“Propriété et capital”, *Prometeo*, Series II, p. 125.

[←15]

*Ibid.*, p. 118.

[←16]

*Ibid.*; *Prometeo*, Series II, p. 533.



[←17]

From the minutes of the meeting at Forli on December 28, 1952: “Le programme révolutionnaire immédiat”, *Invariance*, No. 3, pp. 80-81.

[←18]

“Dialogue avec Staline”, *Il Programme Communiste*, No. 8, pp. 24-25.

[←19]

*Invariance*, Series I, No. 3, p. 62.

[←20]

“La légende du Piave”, *Il Programme Communiste*, No. 26, p. 17. [In English, see “The Legend of the Piave”, online at:

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1963/legend.htm>.

American translator’s note.]

[←21]

*Ibid.* [Translation slightly revised: “grave stones” was replaced with “tombstones”—American translator’s note.]

[←22]

Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

[←23]

An English translation of this text is available online at:

<https://libcom.org/library/factors-race-nation-marxist-theory-amadeo-bordiga> [American translator's note].



[←24]

“Structure économique et sociale de la Russie d’aujourd’hui”, Vol. I, pp. 234-235.